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goose lake prairie

STATE PARK

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THE PARK

Goose Lake Prairie State Park, one of the last remnants of prairie left in Illinois, is in Grundy County about 60 miles southwest of Chicago and 2 miles south of the Illinois River. The original purchase of 240 acres of land was made by the state in 1969. Later additions have brought the total acreage to 2,366. Approximately 1,537 acres are dedicated as Illinois Nature Preserve.

Goose Lake Prairie is one of the largest preserves in the tallgrass prairie region of North America, and is of national significance. Ecologists and other scientists from across the country visit the area to study its wildlife and vegetation.



THE NATURAL SCENE

Goose Lake Prairie is the largest remnants of prairie left in Illinois, the "Prairie State". As such, it is of historical, as well as natural importance. Illinois was once almost three-fourths covered by prairie; now these grasslands have been converted to croplands. This state today is very different from the frontier out of which pioneers struggled to make a living. Goose Lake Prairie is a reminder of the environment with which Illinois Indians and settlers had to contend; a place of grasses, wildflowers, fires and seemingly ceaseless prairie winds.

Prairies are composed of grasses and forbs (wildflowers) with trees and shrubs being present only as scattered individuals or clumps. The most important grasses at Goose Lake Prairie are big bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass, prairie dropseed and little bluestem. Wildflowers include spring forms such as violet shooting star and blue-eyed grass. These give way in summer to false indigo and blazing star and in fall to sunflowers, asters and goldenrods.



Goose Lake Prairie is a haven for wildlife. Wild ducks and geese concentrate on the vast marshland in spring and fall. Rare species such as Henslow's sparrow are common here. The plains pocket gopher inhabits the area as well as such larger mammals as deer and coyote.

Geologic history for the Goose Lake area is rich and diverse. For thirty million years, the Goose Lake area went through cycles of elevations and erosion; much of the time the area was a swamp, grown up with tree-like ferns and other ancient plants. As these plants died, they became covered with layers of mud, and after millions of years of pressure from overlaying deposits, the plants' remains become coal. Shafts were dug and land stripped to mine coal just south and east of the park. The former strip mine area in the park has since been reclaimed. Other evidence of Goose Lake Prairie's past geological history includes the many huge boulders scattered in the field. Farmers had to pull out these rocks and pile them on the edges of the fields or else plowing was impossible. These boulders were not formed in Illinois, but further north, and brought down to this area by glaciers over 10,000 years ago.

HISTORY

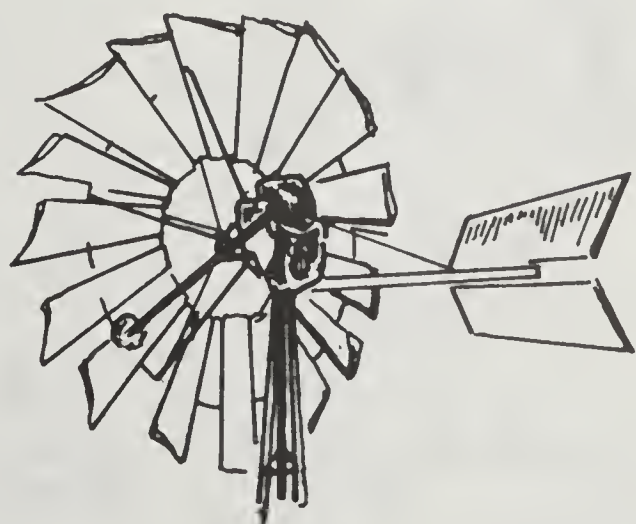
INDIAN: Goose Lake Prairie at one time was the home of the buffalo, wolf, prairie chicken and otter. Early tribes of mound-building Indians dwelt near the area. When the City of Morris, northwest of the park, was being built 19 mounds were uncovered there and more were found just south of the Illinois River. Later tribes of the Illini Confederation settled in the area, where they farmed and grew corn, squash and beans. The Potawatomi were the last tribe to be found near Goose Lake. The tribes most famous chief,

Shabbona, gained notoriety for coming to the aid of settlers during the 1832 Black Hawk War. Despite his services, Shabbona's tribe was forced to move to a reservation in Kansas in 1836. Shabbona later returned to Illinois and is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery of Morris.

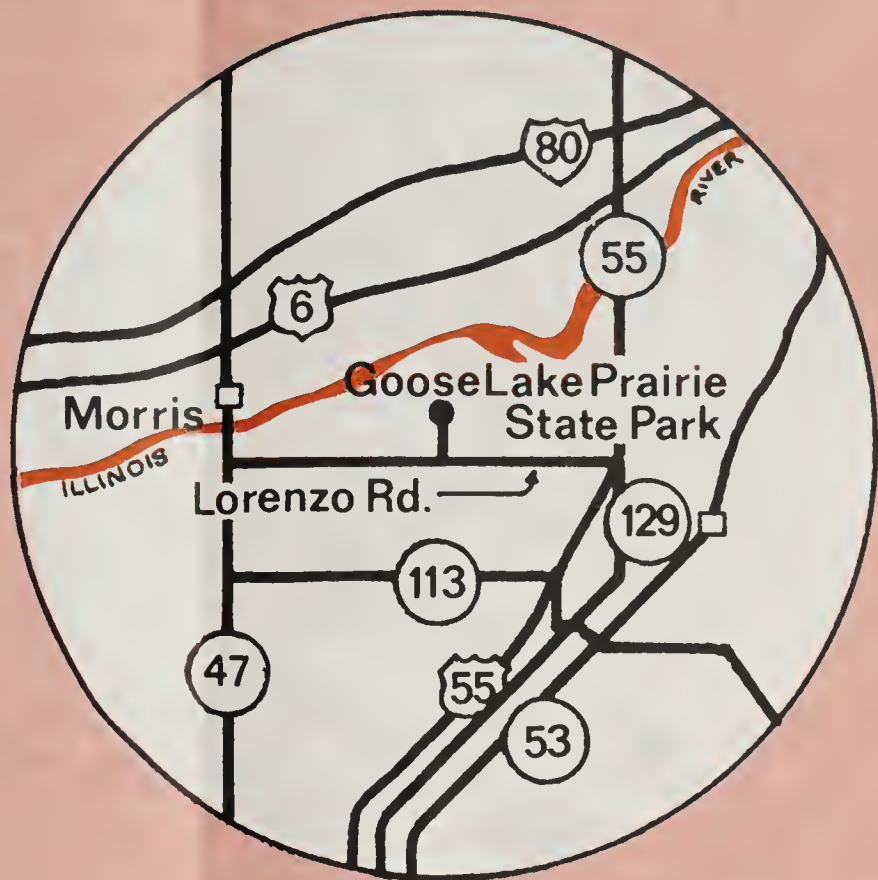
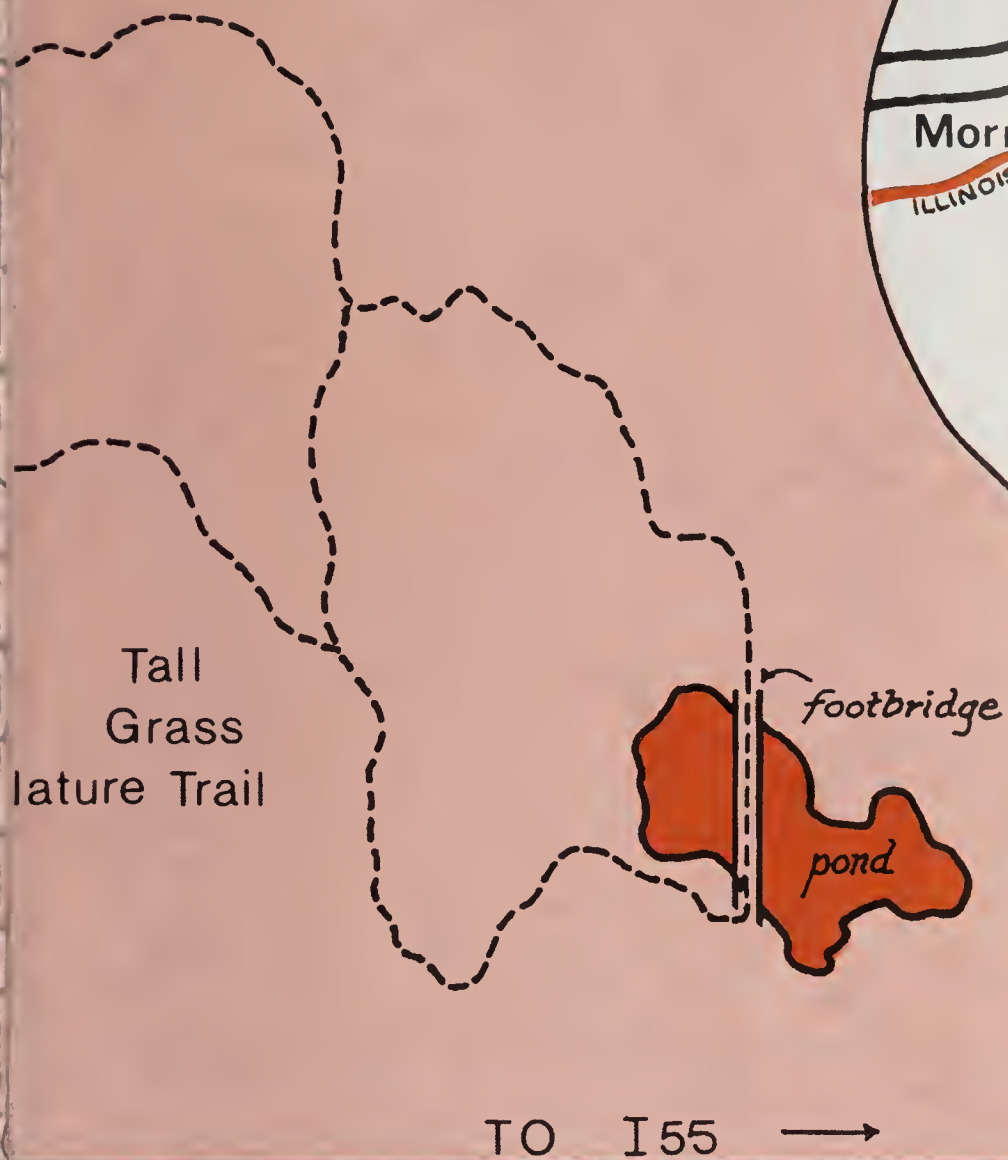
SETTLERS: Peter Lamsett, a Canadian trapper, hunted the Goose Lake Prairie area as early as 1820. William Hoge was the first permanent settler in Grundy County. Some of the pioneer families who settled in the Goose Lake area included the Collins and Holderman's who at one time or another owned much of the present state park. The land was grazed by cattle and some was put to plow. William S. Miller, whose family owned the land where presently the interpretive center is, described the Goose Lake area as almost treeless when he was growing up, but cattle grazing and the lack of fires allowed hawthorn trees to invade the prairie. Pioneers found many hardships waiting for them when they settled the Goose Lake Prairie.

The park is also the site of a once thriving community called Jugtown. Started in 1853, the town once had 50 families who made drain tiles, water jugs, and pottery from clay mined on the edge of Goose Lake. The town had pottery buildings, houses, two boarding houses, one school, a tavern, blacksmith's shop, general store and kilns. Most of the families were from New York but some were from Ireland and England. Transportation was difficult to and from the town, due to muddy roads, and Jugtown's pottery industry ceased to exist after only a few years. All that remains is the old drying shed, kiln and a building believed to be the school.

The lake, Goose Lake, where is it today? The lake itself no longer exists. It was drained just before the turn of the century for farming and for mining the valuable clay underneath it. In its day it was 1,000 acres of water so covered with ducks and geese the water was not visible, hence its name-Goose Lake. What remains is a series of ponds, potholes and marshes. The Tallgrass Nature trail goes through one of the pond and marsh areas.



Nature Preserve



PARK MAP

from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

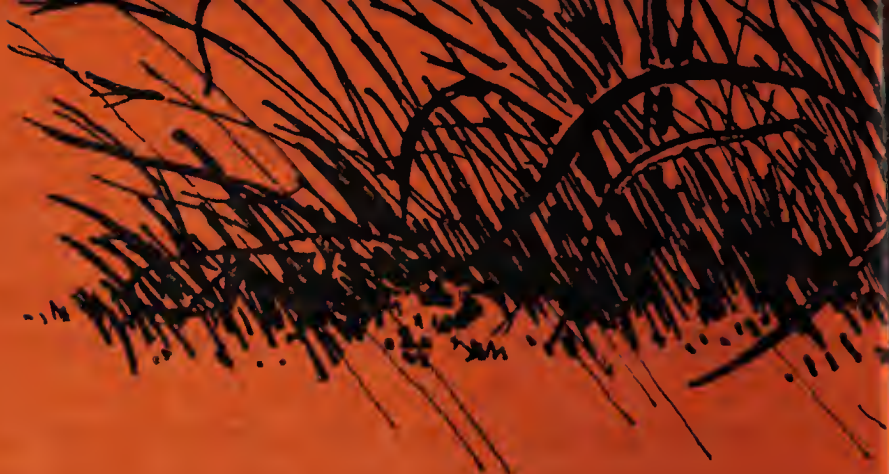
Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette and Giant City and White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge manager.



All state sites are open the year round, except Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact the Site Superintendent, 5010 North Jugtown Road, Morris, Illinois 60450, Phone - 815/942-2899. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Land and Historic Sites, 605 Stratton Office building, Springfield, Illinois 62706.





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